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July 7, 1964

Dr. J. Herbert Hollomon
Assistant Secretary of Commerce
for Science and Technology
Department of Commerce
Washington 25, D. C.

Dear Dr. Hollomon:

Your piece in the C&EN for June 29 was one of the most refreshing calls I have read in a long time. It was a bitter reflection that these views are still so poorly implemented in executive and legislative policy. The marketplace and the voting booth should serve the function, but the choices are not laid out crisply enough, and we are still fumbling the job of how to assign the priorities.

Your reference to the life sciences as the most pregnant area of technical accomplishment is, I think, entirely correct. Ironically, despite extensive support of basic research in health sciences, health technology has used almost nothing but chemistry, and the vast possibilities of mechanical engineering and electronic technology remain virtually unused. May I illustrate: an artificial heart (i.e., a portable pump) is almost certainly within the present state-of-the-art and its development could found a vast, economically self-supporting, as well as humanistically creative, industry. But we lack the policy, the organization, above all the zeal to identify the cogent and remediable problems well within our technological grasp--as you point out.

I believe that this program, the mechanical heart, would have particular merit as a focus of the concerns you expressed. May I ask for your thoughts on how we can in fact get on with it? In the enclosures are some additional reasons not to delay, apart from the obvious one of denying ourselves the early fruits.

Sincerely yours,

Joshua Lederberg
Professor of Genetics